

# Lessons from a Successful Counterinsurgency: The Philippines, 1899-1902

TIMOTHY K. DEADY

“It should be the earnest and paramount aim of the military administration to win the confidence, respect, and affection of the inhabitants of the Philippines . . . and by proving to them that the mission of the United States is one of benevolent assimilation, substituting the mild sway of justice and right for arbitrary rule.”

— President William McKinley  
21 December 1898

The United States topples an unsavory regime in relatively brief military action, suffering a few hundred fatalities. America then finds itself having to administer a country unaccustomed to democratic self-rule. Caught unawares by an unexpectedly robust insurgency, the United States struggles to develop and implement an effective counterinsurgency strategy. The ongoing US presidential campaign serves as a catalyst to polarize public opinion, as the insurrectionists step up their offensive in an unsuccessful attempt to unseat the incumbent Republican President.

These events—from a century ago—share a number of striking parallels with the events of 2003 and 2004. The Philippine Insurrection of 1899-1902 was America’s first major combat operation of the 20th century. The American policy of rewarding support and punishing opposition in the Philippines, called “attraction and chastisement,” was an effective operational strategy. By eliminating insurgent resistance, the campaign successfully set the conditions necessary for achieving the desired end-state.

After a brief review of the conflict, this article will examine the strategic and operational lessons of America’s successful campaign. It will consider the belligerents’ policy goals, strategies, and their centers of gravity. (While

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neither side planned their campaign using these strategic concepts, these terms will be used in analyzing the campaign to facilitate understanding.) Without addressing the considerations of any particular ongoing campaign, the article will identify lessons applicable for winning today's counterinsurgencies.

In order to determine the relevance of the campaign today, this article will consider changes in the international environment that mitigate the direct application of methods successfully employed in the Philippines. To apply some lessons, one must identify alternative ways more appropriate for modern norms that achieve the same ends.

## ***Historical Overview***

### *Annexation*

Unfamiliar to many, the major events of the insurrection that followed America's victory in the Spanish-American War bear review. Admiral George Dewey's May 1898 naval victory over the Spanish fleet was followed in August by a brief, face-saving Spanish defense and surrender of Manila. Filipino forces had vanquished the Spanish from the rest of the country, but the Spanish surrendered the capital to US Army forces under Major General Wesley Merritt. Filipino forces were under the command of Emilio Aguinaldo, a 29-year-old member of the educated class known as the *ilustrados*. Having led an insurrection against Spanish rule in 1896, Aguinaldo, the self-proclaimed President, was wary but hopeful that the American victory would facilitate Philippine independence.

US President William McKinley decided to annex the archipelago for two principal reasons, one ideological, the other interest-based. He announced his decision to a group of missionaries, citing America's duty to "educate the Filipinos and uplift them and Christianize them."<sup>1</sup> Like many, he believed the Filipinos were too backward to capably govern themselves.<sup>2</sup> The practical consideration in an era of unbridled colonialism was that a weak, independent Philippines would be a tempting acquisition for other colonial powers.

### *Insurrection*

Filipinos were shocked when it became known that the Treaty of Paris provided for the United States to purchase the islands from Spain for \$20 million. Buoyed by their success in defeating nearly all of the Spanish

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Colonel Timothy Deady is a Civil Affairs officer in the Army Reserve. He commands the 2d Simulations Exercise Group in the 1st Brigade, 85th Division. A graduate of the US Military Academy, he holds an MBA from the University of Chicago and a Master of Strategic Studies degree from the US Army War College.

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garrisons, Filipino insurgents under Aguinaldo attacked American forces in Manila on 4 February 1899. The failure of this and subsequent conventional battles with the Americans caused the rebel leader to disband the field army and commence guerilla operations in November 1899. Almost captured in December, Aguinaldo fled to northern Luzon.

The Philippine geography had a significant effect on the conduct of the campaign. An archipelago of over 7,000 islands with few roads and dozens of languages, the Philippines is diverse. In 1900 the population was 7.4 million. It consisted of 74 provinces, 34 of which never experienced rebel activity.<sup>3</sup> Luzon, the largest island in the archipelago and site of the capital, was home to half the population. As such, Luzon's military operations were the most extensive in the insurrection. Communications between insurgent forces, never great, broke apart after Aguinaldo's flight. Significant centers of resistance after his escape included those led by General Vicente Lukban on the island of Samar and General Miguel Malvar in southern Luzon. Most insurgent leaders were *ilustrados* from the Tagalog ethnic group; Aguinaldo himself was Tagalog and Chinese. As author Brian Linn emphasizes, the insurrection was conducted differently in different regions. Resistance was fragmented and varied from island to island.

Estimates of the insurgent forces vary between 80,000 and 100,000, with tens of thousands of auxiliaries.<sup>4</sup> Lack of weapons and munitions was a significant impediment to the insurgents. US troop strength was 40,000 at the start of hostilities and peaked at 74,000 two years later. Typically only 60 percent of American troops were combat troops. With a field strength ranging from 24,000 to 44,000, this force was able to defeat an opponent many times its size.<sup>5</sup>

Major General Elwell Otis, the US commander at the start of hostilities (Merritt had joined the Paris negotiations), initially focused his pacification plan on civic action programs, targeting action at the municipal level.<sup>6</sup> When he relinquished command of his 60,000 troops in May 1900, he believed the insurrection to be broken. Later in the summer of 1900, Aguinaldo began to urge his followers to increase their attacks on Americans. His goal was to sour Americans on the war and ensure the victory of the anti-imperialist William Jennings Bryan in the presidential election.<sup>7</sup> Concentrating forces for attacks in September 1900, the guerillas achieved successes against company-sized American units.

McKinley's reelection sapped motivation from the resistance that had anticipated his defeat. On the heels of this setback came another blow in December 1900 with the reinvigorated pacification efforts of Otis's successor, Major General Arthur MacArthur. MacArthur declared martial law and implemented General Order 100, a Civil War-era directive on the law of war

that, among other tough provisions, subjected combatants not in uniform, and their supporters, to execution. This program forced civilians to take sides and served to increasingly isolate guerillas from popular support. After more than a year on the move, Aguinaldo was captured in March 1901.

The war's final year witnessed increased atrocities on both sides. In southern Luzon, Brigadier General J. Franklin Bell set up "concentration camps" for the region's 300,000 civilians.<sup>8</sup> Modeled on Indian reservations, the camps isolated the guerillas from their supporters. Bell then sent his troops to hunt down the region's insurgents and destroy their supply caches. On the island of Samar, a bolo (machete) attack killed 48 of the 74 American soldiers in the garrison at Balangiga in August 1901. A punitive expedition on Samar was conducted so brutally that the island's commander, Brigadier General Jacob Smith, was subsequently convicted at court-martial. Nonetheless, the increasingly fragmented resistance continued to wither. Lukban surrendered in February 1902 and Malvar two months later, effectively ending resistance. President Roosevelt, who had succeeded McKinley after his assassination, waited until the 4th of July to declare victory. The insurrection resulted in 4,234 American fatalities, over tenfold the 379 soldiers killed worldwide in the relatively quick victory over Spain.

## ***Strategy***

### *American Policy and Centers of Gravity*

Initially the US policy toward the Philippines was undetermined. McKinley directed Merritt to provide order and security while the islands were in US possession, without defining their eventual disposition. The President appointed a Philippine Commission to evaluate and report on the islands and recommend a disposition. The chairman, Jacob Schurman, president of Cornell University, concluded the natives were not yet capable of self-government but should eventually become independent. The desired end-state was determined to be a stable, peaceful, democratic, independent Philippines allied to the United States.<sup>9</sup> Key to this were preventing a power vacuum (which could lead to colonization by another developed country), improving the country's education and infrastructure, and implementing and guiding the development of democracy. The method decided upon to achieve the end-state was annexation.

Strategy is the manner in which a nation employs its national power to achieve policy goals and a desired end-state. The "center of gravity" is an important concept for understanding how and where to employ the elements of power. The concept's originator, Carl von Clausewitz, identified it as the source of the enemy's "power and movement, upon which everything de-

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pend.”<sup>10</sup> Current US doctrine extends the concept to both belligerents in a conflict and differentiates between strategic and operational levels of the center of gravity.<sup>11</sup> The essence of strategy then is to apply the elements of power to attack the enemy’s centers of gravity and to safeguard one’s own.

The Filipino insurgents accurately targeted the US strategic center of gravity—the national willpower as expressed by the Commander-in-Chief and supported by his superiors, the voting public. The American populace’s will to victory was the powerful key that brought the nation’s formidable elements of power to bear.

America’s source of operational power, its operational center of gravity, was the forces fielded in the Philippines. Particularly important were the small garrisons. Their ability to eliminate local resistance pacified regions and kept them peaceful. From 53 garrisons in May 1900 when Otis departed, American presence had expanded to over 500 by the time Aguinaldo was captured.<sup>12</sup> Largely isolated from higher-echelon control, small garrisons lived and worked in communities. They tracked and eliminated insurgents, built rapport with the populace, gathered intelligence, and implemented civil works. The process was slow, but once an area was pacified it was effectively denied to the insurgency.

#### *Filipino Policy and Centers of Gravity*

Although a full evaluation of Filipino insurgent strategy is beyond the scope of this article, its effect on the United States must be considered. The goal, or end-state, sought by the Filipino insurgency was a sovereign, independent, socially stable Philippines led by the *illustado* oligarchy.

Local chieftains, landowners, and businessmen were the *principales* who controlled local politics. The insurgency was strongest when *illustrados*, *principales*, and peasants were unified in opposition to annexation. The peasants, who provided the bulk of guerilla manpower, had interests different from their *illustado* leaders and the *principales* of their villages. Coupled with the ethnic and geographic fragmentation, unity was a daunting task. The challenge for Aguinaldo and his generals was to sustain unified Filipino public opposition; this was the *insurrectos*’ strategic center of gravity.

The Filipino operational center of gravity was the ability to sustain its force of 100,000 irregulars in the field. The Filipino General Francisco Macabulos described the insurrection's aim as, "not to vanquish the [US Army] but to inflict on them constant losses."<sup>13</sup> They sought to initially use conventional (later guerilla) tactics and an increasing toll of US casualties to contribute to McKinley's defeat in the 1900 presidential election. Their hope was that as President the avowedly anti-imperialist William Jennings Bryan would withdraw from the Philippines. They pursued this short-term goal with guerilla tactics better suited to a protracted struggle. While targeting McKinley motivated the insurgents in the short term, his victory demoralized them and convinced many undecided Filipinos that the United States would not depart precipitately.<sup>14</sup>

#### *American Strategy*

American strategy effectively targeted both the insurgents' strategic and operational centers of gravity. The oft-repeated observation of Mao Zedong, arguably the most successful insurgent leader of the 20th century, bears repeating: "The people are the sea in which the insurgent fish swims and draws strength." The American pacification program targeted the sea in which the insurgents swam. It lowered the water level until the sea became hundreds of lakes. As American garrisons drained the local lakes, the insurgent fish became easier to isolate and catch. When the insurgents were unable to sustain a formidable force in the field, confidence in victory—and hence unified opposition—withered.

The elements of power America employed in the Philippines were diplomatic, legal, informational, military, and economic. These instruments were adapted to local conditions, sometimes without the permission of the Office of the Military Governor. While there is some discretion as to the category under which an activity should be discussed (for example, the United States concluded an agreement with the Vatican that exercised both diplomacy and economic power), the aggregate effect shows the United States successfully employed its power to target the Filipino centers of gravity.

After the role of the original Philippine Commission was complete, McKinley appointed a second Philippine Commission under William Howard Taft which arrived in June 1900. The presidential charter to this body was to transition the Philippines from military to civilian rule. As implemented, the policy transferred control of each province from the jurisdiction of the Office of the Military Governor to the commission once the province was pacified. When MacArthur departed command in July 1901, all administrative responsibility was transferred to the commission, with Brigadier General Adna Chaffee taking command of the army. Taft added Filipino members to the commission.



He also organized local governments so the elected Filipino officials were under close American supervision.<sup>15</sup>

Taft supported formation of the Federal Party, a group founded by Manila *illustrados* and former revolutionary officers that advocated recognition of US sovereignty as a step toward representative government. The party channeled Filipinos' desires for independence into a peaceful, democratic undertaking. Party members also negotiated the surrender of a number of insurgent leaders.<sup>16</sup>

The famous baseball manager Casey Stengel once described the secret of managing as being able to "keep the guys who hate you away from the guys who are undecided." Realizing that a unified opposition would be more difficult to quash, the United States exploited the natural divisions within Filipino society. Given its geographic and cultural divides, the Philippines was more easily divided than unified. Whereas Otis had cultivated the elite, MacArthur assumed all *principales* not publicly committed to the United States were guilty of collaboration.<sup>17</sup> They had the most to lose, and once convinced of their personal safety, were the most willing to cooperate with the Americans. It was 80 Filipino scouts from the Macabebe ethnic group—under four American officers—who served as a Trojan horse that was admitted to Aguinaldo's camp. Presenting themselves as insurgents, upon entering the camp they captured the insurgent leader and his local supporters.

The United States employed political power to make cooperation lucrative. As Filipinos' participation in government grew, so did the autonomy the United States granted. Army garrison commanders approved local government officials, including mayors and town councils.<sup>18</sup> By checking civilians' passes and providing labor, local politicians earned the right to offer patronage and licenses.<sup>19</sup> As commanders, Otis and MacArthur headed both the army and the Office of the Military Governor. Even commanders of the smallest detachments were dual-hatted, with their civil governance roles gradually assuming primary importance as regions were pacified. The Office of the Military Governor established civil government and laws, built schools and roads, and implemented other civic actions. With time, more Filipinos came to believe in the promise of democratic government, and a tutored transition.

Often considered a subset of diplomatic power, the law enforcement and judicial power employed were significant. While there were some abuses, prisoners generally were treated well by the standards of the day.<sup>20</sup> Three months after the end of the revolt, the US Congress extended most of the protections of the US Constitution to Filipinos.<sup>21</sup>

The United States employed collective punishments that involved families and communities.<sup>22</sup> Municipal officials or *principales* were held responsible for events that occurred in their towns. Prisoners were held until



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***“Civic action and benevolent treatment alone  
were unable to win the Philippine campaign.”***

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they—or family or friends—provided information, weapons, or both. Crops, buildings, and other property could be confiscated or destroyed as punishment. General Order 100 lifted some restrictions on courts, resulting in more prisoners being executed. Rebel leaders were deported to Guam.<sup>23</sup> Filipino police under American control were an extension of US law enforcement powers. The 246 native Manila police officers were responsible for arresting 7,422, including three revolutionary generals.<sup>24</sup>

In an era that preceded mass media, informing the people of events and progress was key to winning Filipinos over to America’s goals. The teaching of Spanish had been restricted during Spain’s 300 years of occupation. Only 40 percent of the population could read any language.<sup>25</sup> English instruction served as a unifying force, a lingua franca that compensated for differences in tribal speech and the lack of written languages.

Education was one of the few points of agreement between Americans who opposed and those who supported annexation. It demonstrated goodwill and made a lasting contribution to the Philippines. Major John Parker credited the 18 soldiers he employed as teachers in Laguna as being more valuable in the classroom than if they had been used more traditionally. Parker’s wife ran schools for 2,000 students, which he believed tranquilized the country more “than a thousand men.”<sup>26</sup> In a forerunner of the Peace Corps, 1,000 Americans came to the Philippines to teach.<sup>27</sup> The United States also founded a university in Manila. The commitment to education supported American goals by indicating steadfastness and the intent to build for the long term. Education was the most popular civic-action mission that did not offer a direct military benefit.<sup>28</sup>

When General Order 100 was implemented, it was proclaimed in English, Spanish, and Tagalog. It clarified that civic works were a secondary priority to “punitive measures against those who continued to resist.”<sup>29</sup> Over time, information operations convinced an increasing number of Filipinos that their interests were best served by the American administration and not the *principales*.

While it was clear that positive incentives might “reconcile the Filipinos to American rule in the long run, the insurgency could . . . be defeated in the short term [only] by military means.”<sup>30</sup> The additional garrisons, Filipino troops, and effective use of the Navy all were important to expanding the reach of American military power.

General Otis had resisted creating large formations of Filipino troops. Faced with the imminent departure of US volunteer units whose term of service would expire in December 1900, General MacArthur authorized the recruitment and training of indigenous Filipino formations.<sup>31</sup> Filipino scouts, police, and auxiliaries often were recruited from social and ethnic groups hostile to the wealthier Tagalog supporters of Aguinaldo. With time it became clear that local police were “some of the most effective counterinsurgency forces the Army raised.”<sup>32</sup> The military auxiliary corps of Filipinos loyal to the United States grew to 15,000.<sup>33</sup>

As befits a campaign in an archipelago, a primary Navy role was interdiction of arms and other shipments. Beyond that, the Navy provided coastal fire support and supported amphibious landings. The embargo’s success is shown in a number of facts. The insurgents’ primary weapon source was captured rifles and ammunition. Guerillas outnumbered firearms. This led to the unusual order that if unable to save both, rifles were a higher priority than comrades. Successful interdiction meant that most insurgent ammunition was reloaded cartridges, up to 60 percent of which misfired.

The military power employed went beyond American troops engaged in fighting guerillas. Soldiers contributed to diplomatic and economic activities as well as civic works. Even in remote locations, American troops supervised road construction. The Army built and ran schools and clinics, administered vaccines, and “conducted sanitation programs and other charitable works.”<sup>34</sup>

As has become characteristic of the American way of war, the economic power employed was significant. Infrastructure improvements such as road-building and laying telegraph lines aided both military operations and the local economy. In a single two-month period near the end of the conflict, 1,000 miles of roads were built.<sup>35</sup> Another program of dual benefit to soldier and citizen alike was disease eradication. The Philippines was plagued with malaria, smallpox, cholera, and typhoid.<sup>36</sup> Army garrison commanders worked with local leaders to ensure clean water and waste disposal.<sup>37</sup> Civil servants were paid relatively high wages.<sup>38</sup> These and other policies convinced the populace of America’s sincere desire to improve the lot of the average Filipino.

Taft negotiated the purchase of 400,000 acres of prime farmland from the Vatican for \$7.2 million, more than its actual value. Although the land could have been appropriated, the purchase kept the church, which had performed many municipal government functions under the Spanish, from resisting the US administration. Filipino peasants gained a significant benefit by purchasing parcels of land from the American administration. The US land purchase and resale was astute. It offered benefits that could not be matched by the insurgents to two constituencies. It also served as a wedge

issue that separated the interests of the peasant guerillas from their land-owning *principale* leaders.<sup>39</sup>

Sometimes curbing economic power aided US efforts. Congress barred large landholdings by American citizens or corporations.<sup>40</sup> By avoiding even the appearance of any ulterior motive or conflict of interest, America strengthened its claim to benevolence.

The weapon collection policy also merits a mention. When implemented in 1899, a 30-peso bounty was initially a dismal failure, with only a few dozen weapons turned in nationwide. By 1901, when coupled with other successful pacification policies, it was common for hundreds of rifles to be surrendered by disbanding insurgent groups. The lesson is that any given tactic, technique, or procedure employed in isolation may fail, but as part of a comprehensive mix of carrots and sticks can be part of an effective program.

In summarizing the application of the tools of American power, it bears repeating that they were not uniformly employed. They varied by region and evolved over time. One district commander, Brigadier General J. Franklin Bell, identified his civil functions as head of the police, judiciary, civil administration, mail, telegraph, tax collection, and road construction activities.<sup>41</sup> Having unified control of the elements of power enabled Bell and his counterparts to effectively orchestrate the counterinsurgency.

### ***Lessons Learned***

The campaign holds a number of lessons at the strategic and operational levels that are valuable for those planning and conducting stability operations.<sup>42</sup> Pacifying the Philippines proved to be more difficult than anyone had predicted. A total of 126,468 US soldiers served there, with troop strength averaging 40,000.

Negligible insurgent activity did not mean victory. Major General Otis headed home in May 1900 convinced that he had succeeded in suppressing the insurrection; yet the war continued for more than two years. Rebel sources subsequently revealed that the early 1900 lull was a period of reorganization and reconstitution.

Effective strategy and tactics took time to develop. There was considerable local variation in the tactics, techniques, and procedures used. American officers implemented forms of civil government often contrary to guidance from the Office of the Military Governor. Some permitted elections; when none were willing to serve, other commanders appointed Filipino leaders.

### ***Strategic and Operational Errors***

American victory came about despite a number of strategic and operational errors. President McKinley had not determined US policy toward the

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***“The odds of success decrease the further one strays from the basic, oft-tested principles of counterinsurgency.”***

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Philippines when Admiral Dewey was dispatched and had still not done so after General Merritt arrived. There was no unity of command in political and military channels until MacArthur relinquished his posts and General Chaffee was subordinated to Taft.<sup>43</sup> Various generals prematurely announced victory—attained or imminent—a number of times. Theodore Roosevelt prudently waited until a few months after field forces had surrendered before declaring the war over. Clearly, one does not need to execute perfectly to prevail.

The insurgents made a number of political and military errors that helped the Americans. Their support was too narrowly based; it rested principally upon a relatively small *principale* oligarchy and the Tagalog-speaking regions of Luzon.<sup>44</sup> Their military errors were substantial. They failed to attack Manila after they had already seized the rest of the country, and then attempted to fight a conventional war. They delayed implementing unconventional tactics. Having adopted the guerilla tactics of protracted warfare, Aguinaldo and his generals mistakenly led their followers to expect a quick victory with McKinley’s defeat. The pre-election peak of guerilla activity in late 1900 cost soldiers, equipment, weapons, and morale that were never replaced.

#### *Changes in the International Environment*

The 20th century saw the greatest technological and social changes in history. Some of these clearly mitigate the direct application of methods successfully employed in the Philippines. One need only consider Kipling’s poetic admonition to “Pick up the White Man’s Burden” for a quick jolt into how different the prevailing standards of acceptable discourse are today. It was an era when the major powers often acted, either unilaterally or in alliance, to secure colonial advantages.<sup>45</sup> Changes in human rights, the media, and international organizations are among those that most significantly limit direct application of the tactics, techniques, and procedures applied in the Philippine Insurrection to early 21st-century stability operations.

The standards for acceptable treatment of prisoners of war and non-combatants also have changed considerably. In the 19th century, General Order 100 was considered such a model for the humane conduct of war that it was

adapted for use by European nations. Yet it provided for sanctions such as suspension of civil rights, deportation, and summary execution.<sup>46</sup> American soldiers moved hundreds of thousands of Filipino civilians into concentration camps to separate them from the guerillas. The camps served to separate the insurgents from their source of strength, the general populace. While incidents of torture and murder by US troops were recorded, they were not widespread. Corporal punishment and physical hazing of American soldiers was still permitted, including use of the stockade. One American soldier was tied, gagged, and repeatedly doused with water as punishment for drunkenness. Though he died, his superiors were found not to have used excessive force.<sup>47</sup>

As unseemly as some treatment of Filipinos may be to modern sensibilities, American soldiers generally acted benevolently. The best testimony to this comes from the Filipinos themselves. Manuel Quezon was an officer of Aguinaldo's who later became President of the Philippines. He complained of the difficulty the insurgents faced in fostering nationalism under their colonial master, "Damn the Americans! Why don't they tyrannize us more?"<sup>48</sup> The lesson here is not merely that prevailing standards have changed. Rather, Americans found legal means to separate the population from the guerillas and did so while acting more humanely than the generally accepted standards of the time.

Telecommunications did not exist in 1902. One need only consider the visibility of the 2004 prisoner abuse scandal in Iraq to appreciate the ubiquity and impact of global news and electronic mail today. News coverage influences multiple audiences: the American people, opposition forces, the undecided population of the occupied territory, and third parties such as current and potential allies.

Discussing the impact of the modern media on combat operations could fill volumes. Considerations that particularly deserve mention are the US populace's famous impatience and aversion to casualties. Americans prefer quick, decisive, and relatively bloodless victories like Urgent Fury and Desert Storm. The United States suffered 4,234 dead and 2,818 wounded in the Philippine Insurrection.<sup>49</sup> Filipino casualties dwarfed those of the Americans. Combat losses exceeded 16,000, while civilian casualties numbered up to 200,000 due to disease, starvation, and maltreatment by both sides.<sup>50</sup> In today's 24-hour news cycle, every combatant and collateral death is grist for at least one day's news mill.

At the time of this writing, Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom are in their second and third years, respectively. America is unlikely to accept years of trial and error to develop the proper mix of tactics, techniques, and procedures if the casualty flow remains steady. Future planners will be expected to engage more troops, sooner, to speed pacification.

The United States acted alone in the Philippines. One marked change in the international environment in the past century is the increase in the prominence of international organizations. The United Nations and NATO are two of the most prominent institutions which may aid or hinder US objectives, but which cannot be ignored. No such organizations existed in 1900.

Today's strategic planner must account for the ubiquitous presence of international and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Credibility is more freely granted to an alliance than to a nation acting unilaterally. The challenge is to incorporate the inevitable presence of international organizations and NGOs into US goals. Ideally this can be done in ways that channel their elements of power toward American ends. At the least, it requires minimizing effects contrary to US aims.

### *Applying the War's Lessons*

Warfare, culture, and geography vary over time and place. No plan can be transposed unchanged from one context to another. The key for the military planner is to glean the proper lessons from principles and history, then apply them to the challenge at hand. By focusing on the strategic and operational lessons of the Philippine Insurrection, this article seeks to identify those higher-level lessons most likely to retain relevancy across centuries and hemispheres.

What then does one take away as the overriding lessons of the Philippine Insurrection? At the strategic level, two flaws in the Philippine experience are easily avoided. Joint force commanders today can expect clearer mission guidance than General Merritt had and a better understanding of the strategic end-state. Political and military elements operating together today, while not free of friction, will be much more closely integrated than those of Taft and General MacArthur.

At the operational level, one observes that each of the elements of national power was effectively employed for at least one of three purposes: separating the guerillas from the populace, defeating the guerillas, and gaining the cooperation of the populace. These lessons are comparable to other compilations of generally accepted counterinsurgency principles.<sup>51</sup> Separation denies support to insurgents and facilitates protecting noncombatants from coercion. Cooperation is best gained by a mix of positive and negative inducements.

Incentives without sanctions, largely the case before December 1900, are much less effective. Unlike General Otis, General MacArthur made known that there were limits to American benevolence. As the cost and risks of supporting the insurrection increase, support will decrease. To return to Mao's metaphor, as the water becomes hotter, it evaporates from around the



fish. While these principles are simple and constant, the appropriate tactics, techniques, and procedures must be developed, adapted to local conditions, constantly reassessed, and permitted to evolve.

Civic action and benevolent treatment alone were unable to win the Philippine campaign. Armed only with good deeds, soldiers were unable to either protect Filipino supporters from retribution or deny support to the insurgents. It was only with the addition of the chastisement tools—fines, arrest, property destruction and confiscation, population concentration, deportation, and scorching sections of the countryside—that soldiers were able to separate guerillas from their support. The proper mix of tactics and techniques appropriate for each local situation was determined by officers in hundreds of garrisons throughout the archipelago.<sup>52</sup>

During the peak of the insurrection, the United States had 74,000 soldiers deployed there—one for every 110 Filipinos. By 1903, a year after America's victory in the Philippines, the number of US troops garrisoning the archipelago had been reduced to 15,000—a ratio of about one soldier for every 500 residents. This timeline and troop level transposed to Iraq would see the US garrison there reduced to 44,000 soldiers by 2008. Although this would represent a significant reduction from current troop levels, it is still the equivalent strength of three Army divisions. A segment of the American populace has been expecting its soldiers to return home as rapidly and casualty-free as they did after Desert Storm. Most Americans do not expect Iraq to remain America's largest overseas presence for years to come.

Some lessons can be adopted almost directly: Take care of supporters. Exploit differing motives and competition between social, ethnic, and political groups. Identify where to insert, and how to hammer, wedges between insurgent leaders and potential supporters. Control or deny the complex terrain where the guerillas find sanctuary—in the Philippines it was jungle; elsewhere it may be desert, urban, or mountain terrain.

Separating guerillas from the general populace needs to be done, but camps are unlikely to be acceptable in our current era. Cordoning off neighborhoods, implementing regional pass systems, and enforcing curfews are some techniques that can help accomplish the same end.

In winning the Filipino population, 600 small garrisons were more effective than 50. Today's soldiers will never be as isolated from support or communications as the Philippine garrisons were. The proper size of a garrison, whether company or squad, must depend on the situation. But the broader the range of benefits—medical, educational, or economic—and sanctions—political, judicial, or military—over which the local leaders have control, the better they will be able to effectively mold the local population to behaviors that accord with mission accomplishment.



No diplomat, soldier, or pundit can know with total accuracy which tactics, techniques, and procedures will succeed in quelling a given insurrection. What is clear is that the odds of success decrease the further one strays from the basic, oft-tested principles of counterinsurgency: separate the population from the insurgents, give them more reasons to support the counterinsurgents, and deny the insurgents safe haven or support from any quarter.<sup>53</sup> Having empirically shown these lessons in the Philippines, one might add another: empower leaders with the freedom to experiment with tactics, techniques, and procedures that achieve the mission while adapting to local conditions. It was the initiative by soldiers at different levels that derived the principles and techniques that won America's first victory in quelling an overseas insurrection.

In the past century there have been tectonic-scale changes in technology, human rights, and the prevailing world order. Despite this, the strategic and operational lessons of the successful Philippine counterinsurgency remain valid and are worthy of study. Those who disparage today's employment of the Army in peace operations and other stability and support operations may be experiencing historical myopia. Although more officers are able to cite the campaign lessons of Douglas MacArthur, it may well be that the successful counterinsurgency campaigns of his father Arthur hold more valuable historical lessons for operations in the coming decades.

At the strategic level there is no simple secret to success. Victory in a counterinsurgency requires patience, dedication, and the willingness to remain.<sup>54</sup> The American strategic center of gravity that Aguinaldo identified a century ago remains accurate today.

#### NOTES

1. Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), p. 105. Boot characterizes McKinley's statement, ignoring the fact that most Filipinos were Catholic, as reflecting the "twin currents of Protestant piety and American jingoism that defined the turn of the century zeitgeist."

2. Rudyard Kipling's poem "Pick up the White Man's Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands" also captures the spirit of the times. Originally published in the February 1899 edition of *McClure's* magazine, it admonishes the United States to "Fill full the mouth of Famine, And bid the sickness cease," for "Your new-caught sullen peoples, Half-devil and half-child." The title of Boot's book comes from a line in the poem.

3. Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War 1899-1902* (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 2000), p. 185.

4. Glenn A. May, *A Past Recovered* (Manila: New Day Publishers, 1987), p. 157, quoted in Linn, p. 325.

5. Boot, p. 126, puts the figure at 80,000. Linn, p. 325, cites 80,000 to 100,000 and the auxiliary strength.

6. Linn, p. 200.

7. John Morgan Gates, *Schoolbooks and Krags: The United States Army in the Philippines, 1898-1902* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), pp. 162-63.

8. Although the term's use is tainted by its Nazi-era usage, this is what the camps were called. They were temporary villages, similar in scope and function to the reservations familiar to some of the Army's old hands who had campaigned against the Plains Indians.

9. Stability did not mean the end of all opposition. The Muslim Moros on the southern island of Mindanao remained in resistance as they had during 300 years of Spanish rule, and as they continue today under Abu Sayef.

10. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*; trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 595-96.
11. US Department of Defense, *Joint Doctrine for Campaign Planning*, Joint Publication 5-00.1 (Washington: US Department of Defense, 25 January 2002).
12. The number of garrisons expanded to 639 by September 1901 under MacArthur's successor, Major General Adna Chaffee.
13. Linn, p. 187.
14. Gates, p. 273.
15. Oscar Theodore Barck, Jr., and Nelson Manfred Blake, *Since 1900: A History of the United States in Our Times* (New York: MacMillan 1974), p. 86. The commission's success enhanced Taft's reputation as a sound administrator and helped him attain the White House.
16. Linn, p. 215.
17. Ibid., p. 213.
18. Ibid., p. 128.
19. Ibid., p. 206.
20. Boot, p. 127.
21. Barck and Blake, p. 86.
22. Linn, p. 213.
23. Deportation continued a practice of the Spaniards. Aguinaldo himself had been deported following the collapse of the 1896 revolution.
24. Linn, p. 128.
25. Gates, p. 31.
26. Linn, p. 203.
27. Boot, p. 115.
28. Linn, p. 258.
29. Ibid., p. 214.
30. Boot, p. 115.
31. Linn, p. 215.
32. Ibid., p. 204.
33. Ibid., p. 128.
34. Boot, p. 126.
35. Linn, p. 258. The period was April-May 1902.
36. Ibid., pp. 15-16.
37. Ibid., pp. 128-29.
38. Ibid., p. 275.
39. Ibid., p. 196.
40. Boot, p. 125.
41. These were in addition to military roles such as fighting guerillas and bandits, destroying supply caches, gathering intelligence, and supporting the district's garrisons.
42. The campaign in the Philippines included combat as well as stability and support operations. While Americans forces conducted what would be categorized today as the full spectrum of operations (offense, defense, stability and support), the stability operations predominated.
43. From their first meeting, MacArthur had treated Taft as an unwelcome intrusion. It was due largely to Taft's influence in Washington that Arthur MacArthur was recalled.
44. Linn, p. 323.
45. During the midst of the Philippine rebellion, the United States, Britain, Germany, Japan, Russia, France, Italy, and Austria acted together to relieve their Peking legations besieged in the Boxer Rebellion.
46. Linn, pp. 211-14.
47. Ibid., p. 221.
48. Boot, p. 125.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Robert R. Tomes, "Relearning Counterinsurgency Warfare," *Parameters*, 34 (Spring 2004). Tomes identifies the principles of counterinsurgency as separating guerillas from the civil populace to deny them assistance, denying them safe havens, and preventing outside support.
52. Linn, p. 327.
53. Edward J. Filiberti, "The Roots of US Counterinsurgency Doctrine," *Military Review*, 68 (January 1988). Although Filiberti credits Franklin Bell with having invented counterinsurgency doctrine, like 26 of the 30 US generals to serve in the insurrection, he had counterinsurgency experience fighting American Indians.
54. Gates, p. 285.